



# Notes from Underground

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Study Guide



Summary

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Characters

**Liza**

When Liza first appears in *Notes from Underground*, her function seems clear: she is the object of the Underground Man's latest literary fantasy and power trip. He has absorbed

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the literary archetype of the redeemed prostitute and has cast himself as the hero who will rescue Liza. Later in the novel, however, her character becomes more complex. When we first meet her, she matches the stereotype of a young prostitute: bored, jaded, and somewhat naïve. When Liza is genuinely moved by the Underground Man's speech, however, we realize that she may be even more innocent than expected. A young girl driven into prostitution by an uncaring family, she still idealizes romantic love and longs for respect and affection. She treasures the one declaration of love she has received, a note from a young medical student who does not know she is a prostitute. The Underground Man is touched by the fact that Liza so clearly treasures this letter, but his attitude toward her emotion is somewhat dismissive. We sense that Liza's sentiment could come from a less-educated version of the Underground Man's Romanticism and that her response to the Underground Man's speeches is shallow. Liza wants to participate in the artificial world the Underground Man creates with his "sentimental" speeches, because she likes the idea of being a romantic heroine instead of an ordinary prostitute.

When Liza responds tenderly and understandingly to the abusive speeches the Underground Man makes at his apartment, however, we see that she is closer to a real heroine than we may have expected. She is perceptive enough to see through the Underground Man's façade of cruelty and apathy, and she is good-hearted enough to try to give him comfort and love. When she finally realizes that the Underground Man is incapable of returning her love with anything but mockery and humiliation, she leaves

with quiet strength and dignity. She throws away the wad of bills that the Underground Man gives her as “payment” for her visit, thwarting his attempt to treat her like a prostitute after she has come to him with help and love.

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### Take a study break

QUIZ: Is This a Taylor Swift Lyric or a Quote by Edgar Allan Poe?



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## Notes

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CHARACTERS



Important Quotations Explained

QUOTES



Themes

LITERARY DEVICES



Review Quiz

FURTHER STUDY

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QUIZ: Is This a Taylor Swift Lyric or a Quote by Edgar Allan Poe?



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